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DE RUEHNT #1306/01 3181147
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 131147Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY TASHKENT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0584
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHAB/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 4482
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 0699
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 5099
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0966
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0396
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0978
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4716
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 3003
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 1002
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 7657
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1662
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1579
RUEHVN/USMISSION USOSCE 2933
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC 0401
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC 0548

C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001306

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA, DRL, PRM, AND DHS/USCIS
PRM FOR MATTHEW JOHNSON, MOSCOW FOR SUSANNE SINCLAIR-SMITH
AND SUSANNE GIBBONS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2018
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [UNDP](#) [UNHCR](#) [AF](#) [TI](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: AFGHAN REFUGEES STILL ENDURE
HARRASSMENT; DEPORTATIONS

REF: A. 07 TASHKENT 1975
 [1](#)B. TASHKENT 608
 [1](#)C. 07 TASHKENT 459
 [1](#)D. 07 TASHKENT 1494

Classified By: POLOFF R. FITZMAURICE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary: The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) office in Tashkent reports that Afghan refugees with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate status in Uzbekistan continue to face harassment and occasional deportation at the hands of authorities.

According to UNDP - which assumed responsibility for monitoring the welfare of mandate refugees after UNHCR was forced to close its office in Uzbekistan in 2006 - there are approximately 944 mandate refugees, mostly Afghans, remaining in the country. Many of the remaining mandate refugees are reportedly ineligible for resettlement in third countries due to past associations with the former Soviet puppet regime in Afghanistan or are the children of such individuals. Poloff also spoke with the directors of two local NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, who explained that growing numbers of new refugees without mandate status were fleeing Afghanistan for Uzbekistan. In addition, they reported that some stateless individuals from Tajikistan have been granted Russian citizenship by the Russian Embassy in Tashkent. We are disappointed that Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan continue to face harassment and even deportation at the hands of Uzbek authorities, but at least the government has not carried out large-scale deportations of Afghan refugees, which it threatened to do last year (ref A).

[12.](#) (C) Post continues to provide as much assistance as possible to the remaining Afghan refugees. Through the State Department's Taft Fund for Refugees (ref B), post has given 20,000 dollars in funding this year to support the operations of the two local NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. A team from DHS/USCIS will be in Tashkent next

week to interview some of the remaining Afghan refugees (and other asylum seekers) for possible resettlement in the United States. End summary.

UNDP REPORTS AFGHAN REFUGEES STILL HARRASSED, DEPORTED

¶ 13. (C) During a recent meeting, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Kyoko Postill told polooff that Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan continue to face harassment and occasional deportation at the hands of Uzbek authorities. According to her, in the past four months, at least four families of Afghan refugees have been forcibly deported from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan, while the number of refugees that have been temporarily detained by Uzbek authorities is much higher. UNDP has sent complaint letters to the MFA following each detention, but so far it has not received any response from the MFA.

¶ 14. (U) Note: In 2006, Uzbek authorities forced the closure of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Tashkent after it assisted Uzbek refugees who fled into Kyrgyzstan following the 2005 Andijon events. Since that time, the UNDP office in Tashkent has monitored the welfare of refugees with UNHCR mandate certificates in Uzbekistan. In March 2007, the government announced that UNHCR mandate certificates would not be considered as the basis for extended legal residence, and persons carrying such certificates must apply for the appropriate visa or face deportation. The government appeared to be effectively ending an agreement with the UNHCR in place since 1999, under

which the government had tolerated the presence of mandate refugees despite not having ratified the 1951 Convention on Refugees and its 1967 protocol. In 2007, there were several reports of police detaining Afghan refugees and forcibly deporting them back to Afghanistan (refs A, C, and D). End note.

SOME, BUT NOT ALL, AFGHAN REFUGEES ARE ECONOMIC REFUGEES

¶ 15. (C) The Uzbek government frequently complains that the Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan are economic refugees, according to Postill. She admitted that some of the Afghan "refugees" in Uzbekistan were wealthy individuals who traveled back and forth between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for business. However, she believed that these businessmen were a minority, not a majority, of the remaining Afghan refugees. UNDP conducted a validation study in early 2008 to weed out economic migrants among the Afghan refugees and as a result, some individuals were removed from the list of UNHCR mandate refugees. She believed that the businessmen who were removed from the list could easily afford to purchase Uzbek visas to normalize their status inside of Uzbekistan.

MANY OF REMAINING REFUGEES INELIGIBLE FOR RESETTLEMENT

¶ 16. (C) According to UNDP's records, there were approximately 944 mandate refugees, mostly Afghans, remaining in Uzbekistan (Note: This is decline from the 1,284 mandate refugees which was reported in July 2007, see ref D. End note.) Postill believed that many of the remaining Afghan refugees were ineligible for resettlement in the United States or other countries because of their past associations with the Khad, the intelligence service of the Soviet puppet "People's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan" regime. She reported that UNDP and UNHCR were still encouraging other countries, including Norway and Sweden, to accept additional refugees, but she believed that at least half of the remaining refugees would be difficult to resettle because of their past associations.

UNDP STILL INVESTIGATING OTHER OPTIONS

¶ 17. (C) Given the continued pressure on Afghan mandate

refugees and the difficulty of resettling them in third countries, UNDP and UNHCR have reportedly examined other options. Postill explained that UNDP and UNHCR tried to encourage some of the Afghan refugees to voluntarily return home, but only a few families have so far done so. UNDP also has encouraged the Uzbek government to grant Uzbek citizenship to those Afghans who have married Uzbek citizens, but to no avail. Postill noted that if the government does move to deport large number of mandate refugees, UNDP will have to consider taking more drastic measures, including moving the remaining refugees to either Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan. However, she said that UNDP was only discussing this possibility internally at the moment. She also added that UNHCR was consolidating its operations in Central Asia in Almaty and could close its office in Bishkek.

NGOS CONFIRM UNDP'S REPORTS ON AFGHAN REFUGEES

¶8. (C) Poloff also met recently with the heads of two NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan: the Tashkent-based International Professional Education Development Assistance Center (PROFED) and the

Termez-based Ayol va Zamon Surkhandarya Regional Center for Increasing the Socio-Economic Activity of Women and Youth. The NGO directors confirmed that UNHCR mandate refugees from Afghanistan continue to face harassment and occasional deportation at the hands of Uzbek authorities. PROFED directors Pavel Ionkin and Natalya Krokhmal and Ayol va Zamon Chairperson Gulnora Khodjaniyazova noted one extreme case where Afghan refugees who had already been selected for resettlement in Canada - including six families from Tashkent and two families from Termez - were deported earlier this year to Afghanistan by Uzbek authorities. As far as the NGOs knew, the individuals were still in Afghanistan and have not yet been resettled in Canada.

¶9. (C) According to the NGOs, the refugees continue to experience frequent harassment, including authorities tearing up their UNHCR mandate certificates. UNDP has reportedly issued the Afghans new mandate certificates after they have been destroyed by Uzbek authorities. The NGOs also operate hotlines that refugees can call when they are in trouble. The NGO directors explained that Afghan refugees are held at the Bektamir detention facility in Tashkent, where, according to Uzbek law, they can be kept for up to six months before being deported. The NGO directors reported that, in some instances, they have been able to intervene on behalf of refugees and have them released, including by paying bribes when necessary. The PROFED directors said that they had visited Bektamir on one occasion, and found conditions there to be tolerable, "no different than any other prison or detention facility in Uzbekistan." The PROFED directors added that they had approached the Afghan Embassy in Tashkent on behalf of Afghan refugees, but found that it was generally reluctant to provide assistance.

COMPOSITION OF MANDATE REFUGEES FROM AFGHANISTAN

¶10. (C) Of the roughly 1,000 mandate refugees remaining in Uzbekistan, the NGO directors reported that most of them either had ties with the Khad or were the children of such individuals. Roughly two-thirds of the mandate refugees were adults, while one-third of them were children. Most of the refugees lived in Tashkent, while approximately 150 of them lived in Termez, according to Khodjaniyazova. The NGO directors noted that the overall number of mandate refugees in Uzbekistan has declined considerably from 2006 - when more than 2,000 of them lived in Uzbekistan - thanks to resettlement in third countries, including the United States.

MOST AFGHAN REFUGEES STRUGGLE TO SUPPORT THEMSELVES

¶11. (C) The NGO directors noted that many Afghan refugees struggled to make ends meet in Uzbekistan. Most of them

cannot find work, while their children are unable to attend Uzbek schools. The refugees also experience social prejudice, as many Uzbeks view them as criminals or drug users. The PROFED directors reported that UNHCR and UNDP provided some limited financial aid to the mandate refugees, providing each family with between 30 and 50 dollars a month.

Ionkin and Krokhmal noted that many of the refugees suffered from medical and mental ailments, and that it was difficult for them to receive appropriate treatment.

¶12. (C) The NGO directors acknowledged that some of the Afghans were economic refugees, but noted that they were a minority. They also explained that many of the refugees were still afraid to return to Afghanistan. Ionkin and Krokhmal reported that a 2005 survey of refugees showed that only 2

percent of them wished to return. They added that some of those who have been deported by Uzbek authorities have returned to Uzbekistan again due to safety concerns.

NEW AFGHAN REFUGEES REPORTEDLY CROSSING THE BORDER

¶13. (C) The NGO directors said that growing numbers of new refugees from Afghanistan, who lacked mandate status, were coming to Uzbekistan. While some of the new individuals are economic refugees, others are reportedly fleeing the growing violence in Afghanistan. These new Afghan refugees are unable to acquire mandate status in Uzbekistan, due to the closure of UNHCR's office in 2006. PROFED has assisted some of the new refugees travel to UNHCR's office in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to receive mandate certificates and await resettlement in third countries. However, the NGO directors said that many of the new Afghan refugees have been detained and deported by Uzbek authorities.

TAJIK REFUGEES AND STATELESS PERSONS

¶14. (C) The NGOs reported that the situation for Tajik refugees, most of whom came to Uzbekistan during the Tajik civil war in the 1990s, was much less severe than for Afghan refugees. Unlike the Afghan refugees, many of the Tajik refugees are ethnic Uzbeks, and therefore face fewer social prejudices and are generally able to assimilate into local communities and find work, albeit illegally. Many of the Tajik refugees have only old Soviet Union passports and have become stateless. According to the NGOs, there were roughly 250 stateless persons registered with UNHCR in Uzbekistan, almost all Tajik refugees. In addition, the NGOs estimated that there were approximately 3,000 unregistered cases of stateless persons from Tajikistan in Uzbekistan.

SOME STATELESS INDIVIDUALS RECEIVE RUSSIAN CITIZENSHIP

¶15. (C) The NGO directors reported that some Tajik refugees with old USSR passports have been granted Russian citizenship by the Russian Embassy in Tashkent. They noted that the process for receiving Russian citizenship was complicated and required paying a significant registration fee.

¶16. (C) Poloff knows personally one Tajik refugee, the husband of an Embassy employee (protect), who was granted Russian citizenship after living in Uzbekistan for many years as a stateless individual. Uzbek authorities refused to grant the husband Uzbek citizenship, despite the fact that he was ethnically Uzbek and married to an Uzbek citizen. Roughly five years ago, the husband was granted Russian citizenship and a passport by the Russian Embassy in Tashkent. The Embassy employee added that she knew several other stateless individuals from Tajikistan in Uzbekistan who have likewise been granted Russian citizenship over the years. The Embassy employee believed that Tajik refugees could freely return to Tajikistan and receive Tajik citizenship (she knew of at least one case of this occurring), but she noted that most of the refugees were reluctant to return to Tajikistan due to bleak economic

prospects there.

¶17. (C) Recently, however, the husband has faced serious difficulties renewing his Russian passport and is in danger of becoming stateless again. Russian Embassy officials refused to renew his passport last month, claiming that his name did not appear in an internal list of Russian citizens

in Uzbekistan. The Embassy employee reported hearing rumors that officials at the Russian Embassy have demanded bribes in exchange for granting Russian passports to individuals in Tashkent and speculated they would also seek to eventually extort a bribe from her husband (Note: We are unable to confirm these rumors. End note.) Last week, two officials at the Russian Embassy in Tashkent, including the Consul, were killed in a car accident in southern Kazakhstan. Afterwards, a local employee at the Russian Embassy reportedly told the husband that their consular section was "in chaos" and it would be several weeks before they would be able to review his case again.

NGOS RECEIVE FUNDING FROM TAFT FUND FOR REFUGEES

¶18. (C) On behalf of PROFED and Ayol va Zamon, post applied for and received a total of 20,000 dollars in funding through the State Department's Taft Fund for Refugees. PROFED received 15,000 dollars, including for assisting refugees with resettlement and repatriation; offering medical, social, and material support services to refugees; and providing their children with general educational programs. Ayol va Zamon received 5,000 dollars to increase refugees' employment opportunities by improving their vocational skills through four professional courses: sewing and embroidery, computer literacy, artistic embroidery (beadwork), and computer repair and servicing (ref B). Post distributed the funds to both NGOs in August.

COMMENT

¶19. (C) We are disappointed to hear that Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan continue to face harassment and even deportation at the hands of authorities, but at least the government has not carried out large-scale deportations of the remaining UNHCR mandate refugees, which it threatened to do last year (ref A). Over the past two years, more than half of the mandate Afghan refugees have been resettled in the United States and other countries. A team from DHS/USCIS will be in Tashkent next week to interview some of the remaining Afghan refugees (and other asylum seekers) for possible resettlement in the United States, but as noted by UNDP and the NGOs, many of the refugees may be ineligible due to their past associations. If the pressure on the remaining mandate refugees becomes more severe, UNDP may be forced to consider taking more drastic measures, including moving the refugees to Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan. The United States also should encourage other countries, including Norway and Sweden, to accept greater numbers of Afghan refugees from Uzbekistan. In the meanwhile, we also will continue to support the efforts of local NGOs like PROFED and Ayol va Zamon that provide critical humanitarian assistance to refugees in Uzbekistan.

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